

# Who Lost Gorbachev?

Alluding to the Russian empire's annexation of unwilling peoples, Karl Marx was once moved to call Russia "the prison of nations." While this has never been more true than under communism, Mikhail Gorbachev was supposed to represent a repudiation of the impulse.

He did in fact keep Soviet troops in their barracks as the Soviet empire collapsed in Eastern Europe. In Beijing just before Tiananmen Square, he said that were a similar situation to develop in the Soviet Union, it would be solved "within the political process, and in the spirit of glasnost." But this Mr. Gorbachev has been lost, and we now see him resolving events in Lithuania in the spirit of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Apparently Mr. Gorbachev is willing to give up nations the Soviet Union conquered while it was an ally of the West, but not those it conquered when it was an ally of Hitler five or six years earlier. Whatever validity anyone may find in this distinction, the startling thing is the price he seems willing to pay to hold Lithuania. To wit, his entire program of both perestroika and glasnost.

Those who do business with the Soviet Union should particularly wonder how an economic embargo fits into perestroika. Closing down existing pipelines for political reasons is not going to help the Soviet economy. Can the Soviets really maximize their production by closing down refineries?

Even if tanks do not in the end run through Vilnius, the Lithuanian crisis is also exposing the limits of glasnost. Much fuss was made over the newly independent press, but the major organizations—Pravda, Izvestia, Soviet television—have been snapped back into line. They are printing a stream of coordinated misinformation about Lithuania. According to a Radio Free Europe analyst, "The campaign appears to be unprecedented in the era of glasnost, and can only be compared with Soviet media coverage of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968."

Since the final confrontations with Andrei Sakharov, there has been a different Gorbachev on the TV screens: irritable, arrogant, intolerant, cruel. Indeed, he is beleaguered on all sides. Soviet generals have become vocal and belligerent, fearing that Lithuanian draft-dodging will set off anti-militarism nationwide. Last month a group of KGB officials issued a dramatic appeal for the restoration of order in society.

The leadership cannot settle on an economic plan, though the deadline is past. On Wednesday the leader of the Soviet trade union federation, representing 140 million workers, threatened to tank the entire economic proj-

ect if the state does not meet his demands, including guaranteed jobs for all workers.

The Soviet troops have tried to provoke violence, but the Lithuanians, who in the past weeks have been conciliatory at every turn, would have none of it. Even some conservatives write off the Baltics, but independence is no passing fancy in Lithuania. There was a guerrilla war against Soviet occupiers from 1945 to 1952, despite tens of thousands of deportations. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were more dissident publications per capita in Lithuania than any other republic.

Despite their fears, the Lithuanians will hunker down. President Vytautas Landsbergis has said bravely that his people could endure for months. Citizens in the West might remember that it is possible to hire supply ships, and Lithuania has ports and things to trade. The nations on the Baltic Sea seem unwilling to offer practical assistance, except perhaps Norway.

Western governments are now limbering up their jawbone muscles. Typically, the European Community has called for a committee to prepare a report on the matter. But in general foreign-policy officers in all governments have been loath to let Lithuania endanger their own pet projects. Arms controllers don't want arms control disturbed, trade negotiators want their talks to continue, and Germany in particular does not want to endanger the chance of unification.

Yet Lithuania is likely to prove a defining event. If Mr. Gorbachev does not stand for openness and economic restructuring in the Baltics, then he does not stand for them at all. Mr. Gorbachev has been primarily concerned with staying in power, and has surely observed that in every nation of Eastern Europe, true reform meant the ouster of the communist leadership. Boris Yeltsin will probably lead a split in the party. What might Mr. Gorbachev be thinking?

In Lithuania he is developing a formula—use troops not to mob the streets but to occupy key buildings, do not shoot people indiscriminately but arrest them one by one, do not move until you have expelled Western correspondents, turn off energy supplies. If it succeeds in Lithuania it can be applied elsewhere. In East Germany the Soviets still have 380,000 troops; and even West European nations have put part of their energy supply at risk by paying for the pipeline some of us warned against in the early 1980s. Above all, Lithuania shows that Mr. Gorbachev is not the open, liberal reformer so many in the West have imagined. Who lost Gorbachev? He was never ours to lose.